

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) garner more interest than any other wildlife species in Virginia. Many Virginians relish the chance to hunt, watch, or photograph this graceful mammal. Deer hunting is a deeply-rooted social tradition in Virginia. The economic impact of deer hunting in Virginia is over \$250 million annually. However, as the largest wild herbivore (plant-eater) in the Commonwealth, deer have a profound impact on forest ecosystems. Deer also inflict millions of dollars in damage to crops, trees, and gardens and are a safety risk on our highways.

Deer were plentiful and widespread when Jamestown was settled in 1607. By 1900, over-harvest of deer for food and hides had nearly extirpated the species. Since the 1930s, Virginia's deer population has rebounded as a result of protective game laws, restocking of deer into areas where they were absent, and land use changes. Since the early 1990s, deer management objectives have switched from restoring and increasing to controlling and stabilizing populations over much of the Commonwealth.

Under optimal conditions, a deer population can double in size annually. With no regulating factor (e.g., predators, hunters), a deer population would expand to the point where some resources, generally food, would become scarce. Deer have few natural predators in Virginia, and other sources of mortality (e.g., diseases, injuries) are not sufficient to control populations. Active deer management is necessary to maintain deer populations at optimum levels to meet the needs of citizens of the Commonwealth. An optimum deer population balances positive demands (e.g., hunting, viewing) with negative demands (e.g., agricultural damage, vehicle collisions, ecosystem impacts). The Virginia Deer Management Plan identifies areas where deer populations should be managed to increase, decrease, or remain the same.

The first Virginia Deer Management Plan, completed in 1999, was revised during 2005-2006 through the involvement of stakeholders and managers of deer. Biological principles continue to play a major role in the success of deer management programs, but meaningful stakeholder involvement is also necessary. Although VDGIF has traditionally incorporated public input into deer management decisions, it was not until development of the first Virginia Deer Management Plan in 1999 that a diverse cross section of stakeholders formally participated in a process to establish direction for deer management. Because VDGIF's mission is "to serve the needs of the Commonwealth," the processes used to develop and revise the deer plan incorporated public values (e.g., economic, sociological, and political) and biological considerations.

The Deer Management Plan is intended to embody the interests of all Virginians. Deer stakeholders focused on making value choices about deer management, while wildlife professionals focused on the technical aspects. A 17-member Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) represented a cross section of stakeholders: homeowners, sportsmen, nonconsumptive interests, agricultural producers, commercial timber industry, zoos, and resource management agencies. The SAC was responsible for identifying the goals that should drive deer management. VDGIF staff with technical expertise in deer management designed objectives and strategies based on values identified by the SAC. Additional public values were considered via stakeholder surveys and advertisement of the draft plan for broad public review. Deer experts external to VDGIF provided a technical review of the draft plan. The final draft was presented to the VDGIF Board of Directors on \_\_\_\_\_ and approved.

The revised Virginia Deer Management Plan will guide deer management across the Commonwealth through 2015. This plan describes the history of white-tailed deer management, current status (supply and demand) of the deer resource and management programs, and the future of the deer management program in Virginia. The plan identifies a framework of what needs to be done, how it should be done, and when it should be done. Guided by the VDGIF mission statements, the Virginia Deer Management Plan includes 4 goals which specify the general directions for: (1) deer populations, (2) deer habitat, (3) deer damage, and (4) deer-related recreation. Specific objectives help guide the attainment of each goal. Preferred strategies then clarify how each objective should be achieved. By clarifying goals and directions of deer management, this plan will assist the VDGIF Board of Directors, VDGIF administrators and staff, and the public in addressing deer issues.